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# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 12, 2021

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## **Southwest Virginia Sportsmen and Department of Wildlife Resources Receive \$2.2 Million for Ecotourism Project and Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands**

**BUCHANAN COUNTY-** A chance to view wildlife unique to Southwest Virginia is the goal of the Southwest Virginia Sportsmen and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) through the Ecotourism in Nature's Wonderland project. The project was awarded \$2,254,750 from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy's (DMME) Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization program to help establish a healthy habitat on 2,500 acres in Buchanan County. The project will turn 350 acres of an historic surface coal mine into an ideal habitat for area wildlife with plants and grasses beneficial to all species that live in this area of Buchanan County.

The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) received \$10 million from the U.S. Department of Treasury to help identify abandoned mine land sites that could be reclaimed to boost the economy of the southwest region of the Commonwealth.

"Outdoor recreation is a popular pastime for Southwest Virginians and draws visitors to the area as well," said **Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA)**. "This federal AML Economic Revitalization grant to Ecotourism in Nature's Wonderland in Buchanan County will support outdoor pursuits by reclaiming abandoned mine properties and making them safe and accessible. Hunters, fishers, ecotourists, and all who enjoy our region's natural environment stand to benefit from this project."

The result will be public access to view unique wildlife such as elk, white tail deer, bear, turkey and hundreds of birds and butterflies. Hunting opportunities will also be available at a later date. Located near the established Poplar Gap Park, this project is expected to create jobs, increase

tourism to Buchanan County and local attractions and businesses and help educate visitors about native wildlife.

“DMME has been involved in growing the elk herd in southwest Virginia since the very beginning,” said **DMME AML Projects Manager Lesa Baker** “We are glad to continue to be a part of this unique opportunity through this AMLER project. This is a great use of historic coal mining land and a true testament innovative reclamation in our coalfields.”

“We are excited to share our work and the natural beauty of this area with visitors to the region,” said **Southwest Virginia Sportsmen President Leon Boyd**. “As conservationists this project highlights our love for the outdoors and the land by creating a habitat for a growing herd on a former coal mine, offering a beautiful view for those hoping to catch a glimpse of these elk in their natural state and to offer a place for sportsmen to enjoy for years to come.”

“The re-establishment of elk in Central Appalachia has been a major success, in part, due to habitat created from mining processes and the reclamation of the lands used. This AMLER grant has provided a unique opportunity for many wildlife species, including Virginia's growing elk herd, to benefit from lands that have not been fully reclaimed,” said **DWR Elk Project Leader Shannon Bolling**. “This is a win-win-win; for the community, the wildlife and restoration of abandoned mined land features. We are honored to be a part of the program and to be able to collaborate with SWVA Sportsmen and DMME. We look forward to the benefits it will bring to the public, especially when folks want to come enjoy elk.”

Ecotourism in Nature’s Wonderland was one of 19 proposals submitted to the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) for the 2018 grant. The agency reviewed proposals for eligibility and then took them before an advisory council made up of people involved in local economic development. The council chose ten projects to go to the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) for approval.

The AMLER originated in a federal omnibus bill. DMME first received \$10 million in 2017 and has annually through 2020.

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